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CLIC PAPERS

**COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES:
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

**Army - Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia**

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

FORM 100-100-100-100
OASD R&D 3704 3700
EOD Date: Jun 30 1985

1a REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified		1b RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS N/A	
2a SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY N/A		3 DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT This paper has been cleared for public release by Security and Review Authorities.	
2b DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE N/A		5 MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
4 PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			
6a NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict	6b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) A-AF CLIC	7a NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
5c ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Langley AFB, VA 23665-5556		7b ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9 PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10 SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO	PROJECT NO
		TASK NO	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO
11 TITLE (Include Security Classification) Counterinsurgency in the Philippines: Problems and Prospects			
12 PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Robert B. Stephens, Captain, USAF			
13a TYPE OF REPORT Final	13b TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO N/A	14 DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1989 October	15 PAGE COUNT 47
16 SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17 COSATI CODES		18 SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	
		Counterinsurgency, Philippines	
19 ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) This research project examines the Aquino government's response to the nationwide communist insurgency in the Philippines on three levels: the political, the socioeconomic, and the military. Each of these are interrelated and together provide a cogent picture of the insurgency movement. Additionally, the study shows that the primary New People's Army (NPA) objective is to create a new regime based on egalitarian values and centrally controlled structures designed to mobilize the people and radically transform the social structure within the existing political community. It suggests the political war in the countryside favors the NPA in many areas because it is the only organization providing basic social services to the people. While looking at some of the goals, techniques, strategies, and accomplishments of the NPA, we are able to examine possible policy options for both the Aquino government and the United States.			
20 DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21 ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified	
22a NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL William F. Furr, Lt Col, USAF		22b TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (804) 764-2630	22c OFFICE SYMBOL A-AF CLIC

COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES:

by

Robert B. Stephan, Captain, USAF

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UNCLASSIFIED	<input type="checkbox"/>
JANUARY 1980	

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Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia 23665-5556

October 1989

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PREFACE

This paper is the result of extensive research conducted by Captain Robert B. Stephan, Assistant Professor of Political Science, United States Air Force Academy. The project was conducted under the joint sponsorship of the Frank J. Seiler Research Laboratory and the Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans, Headquarters Pacific Air Forces.

In conducting the research, Captain Stephan interviewed a number of senior military and civilian decisionmakers, including individuals from the Philippines and from the US Departments of Defense and State, Congress, and the academic community. The research project examines the Aquino government's response to the nationwide communist insurgency in the Philippines on three levels: the political, the socioeconomic, and the military. Each of these are interrelated and together provide a cogent picture of the insurgency movement.

Additionally, the study shows that the primary New People's Army (NPA) objective is to create a new regime based on egalitarian values and centrally controlled structures designed to mobilize the people and radically transform the social structure within the existing political community. It suggests the political war in the countryside favors the NPA in many areas because it is the only organization providing basic social services to the people. While looking at some of the goals, techniques, strategies, and accomplishments of the NPA, we are able to examine possible policy options for both the Aquino government and the United States. The Aquino government has emphasized the military response while failing to undertake effective, fundamental socioeconomic reforms. While the NPA doesn't possess the capabilities to achieve a military victory, neither do the tactics and efforts of the Filipino armed forces, and at times they are actually counterproductive. The policy recommendations of this study call for a comprehensive program that balances socioeconomic reforms with the restoration of the government's commitment to social justice and with appropriate military action.

COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES:

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Corazon Aquino took office as president of the Philippines on 25 February 1986. This event represented the culmination of a successful civil-military uprising that marked the end of more than two decades of corrupt and brutal dictatorship under Ferdinand Marcos. It also represented the final victory of the so-called "pragmatists" within the State Department over the "ideologues" who had consistently clung to the idea that political and socioeconomic reform in the Philippines had to be implemented with Marcos in place. The pragmatists were certain that the Aquino victory would deal a death blow to the nationwide New People's Army (NPA) communist insurgency. After all, as one senior State Department official put it in early 1986:

The new government, in contrast to the previous government, enjoys widespread popular support. . . . The principal propaganda target of the communists, the Marcos regime, is gone . . . [and] the communist election boycott [of the February 7, 1986 presidential elections] was repudiated by the majority of Filipinos by an even greater margin than during the 1984 national assembly elections.¹

A centrist, reformist alternative to both a corrupt right-wing dictatorship and the revolutionary left had emerged in the Philippines which hopefully would undercut the legitimacy of the communist insurgency and seize the political initiative through the restoration of democracy and implementation of socioeconomic reforms.

In March, 1988, Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage declared in testimony before Congress, "In the slightly more than two years President Aquino has been in office, she has amassed a solid record of achievements particularly evident when juxtaposed with the bankrupt political, economic, and military situation she inherited."² True, President Aquino's record of accomplishments since taking office has been rather impressive. Democratic institutions are once again in place in the Philippines. A new constitution was fashioned in early 1987 and approved by 76 percent of the population in a national referendum. Congressional elections were held in May 1987 (in which the Aquino coalition won 92 percent of the votes), and political appointees at the village and provincial levels were replaced with popularly elected officials in the January 1988 local elections. All of these electoral exercises were carried out in an environment characterized by a surprisingly low level of political violence for the Philippines.

On the economic scene, macro indicators also reflect favorably upon the achievements of the Aquino government. Following years of negative growth under Marcos, the Philippine economy grew by 5.7 percent in 1987, with current trends indicating a 6 percent growth rate for 1988.³ According to State Department sources, domestic investment in the Philippines began to recover in 1987, with a 19.7 percent increase over 1986.⁴ Foreign investment also grew in overall terms in 1987. In 1988, per capita income increased for the first time in 7 years, while the government has been able to hold the annual inflation rate to about 7.5 percent.⁵

All in all, her efforts to restore faith in Philippine institutions and arrest the economic decline associated with the final years of the Marcos regime have earned President Aquino the respect of an overwhelming number of fellow Filipino citizens. In fact, the results of a nationwide opinion poll conducted in May, 1988 showed that 76 percent of the respondents were satisfied with Aquino's performance.⁶

Corazon Aquino came to power in February 1986 promising reform, not revolution. According to Frederick Brown of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "She won because the business and professional classes, the church, and millions of 'people power' folk (and finally the military) believed chaos, followed by communism, were inevitable if Marcos stayed."⁷ Aquino had no real plan upon coming to power other than getting rid of Marcos. She brought with her no real program to solve deep-seated societal problems. She assumed that the majority of the communist insurgents would throw down their weapons and pledge themselves to the peaceful electoral process once democratic institutions had been restored. This line of reasoning reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the real roots of the NPA insurgency. Marcos didn't create the conditions necessary for insurgency in the Philippines -- he merely exacerbated the problems inherent in a system characterized by socioeconomic injustices with roots going back hundreds of years.

The ouster of Marcos and President Aquino's own legitimacy have slowed the progress of the NPA insurgency but have not stopped it. Although President Aquino has tremendous moral authority at the national level, "the presence of her government is barely felt at the local level."⁸ The political war in the countryside is going the NPA's way in many areas because they are the only organization providing basic social services to the people. In various rural and urban communities throughout the archipelago, "enforcement of justice is a typical social service provided by the NPA."⁹ The attitude of the traditional elites who returned to power with Aquino makes the attainment of meaningful socioeconomic reform very doubtful. The problem is that without truly meaningful reform, the armed left will continue to grow in strength, and the government might ultimately find itself engaged in a very bloody civil war.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Aquino government's response to the nationwide communist insurgency in the Philippines. I will analyze the government's counterinsurgency effort on three different levels -- political, socioeconomic, and military -- focusing on current problem areas and recommendations for future actions in each area. As the United States has a vested interest in a stable, democratic Philippines, I will conclude with an examination of the options available to the US Government to assist the Aquino government in combatting the root causes of the insurgency.

In his forthcoming book, Analyzing Insurgencies, Bard O'Neill suggests that government response is the most important factor in weighing the progress and eventual outcome of insurgencies.¹⁰ In his chapter on government response, he quotes Professor Walter Sonderlund assaying:

. . . as soon as the challenge is in the open, the success of the operation depends not primarily on the development of insurgent strength, but more importantly on the degree of vigor, determination, and skill with which the incumbent regime acts to defend itself, both politically and militarily.¹¹

In other words, the question of whether or not the insurgents will triumph depends not so much on their actions as on the government's reaction. In the case of the NPA insurgency in the Philippines, the bottom line is "Can the government provide services and maintain security at the local level within a democratic framework?"¹²

To defeat an insurgent movement, a government must be cognizant of the nature of the threat it faces. Specifically, the government must possess a detailed knowledge of the end goals of the insurgents and the strategy they are using to ultimately achieve those goals. Although this all appears to be rather straightforward, as O'Neill points out, "historical and contemporary data reveal numerous instances wherein governments have devised misdirected policies because they misunderstood or falsely portrayed the goals, techniques, strategies, and accomplishments of their opponents."¹³ As we will see, O'Neill's statement has direct application to the counterinsurgency strategy currently being undertaken by the Aquino government.

The NPA insurgency in the Philippines is a revolutionary insurgency whose ultimate goal is "a new regime based on egalitarian values and centrally controlled structures designed to mobilize the people and radically transform the social structure within [the] existing political community".¹⁴ Following an initial concentration in the northern Luzon area in the early 1970s, the NPA has since opted for decentralization and expansion of its operations throughout the archipelago. In this

manner, the NPA is able to challenge the government whenever opportunities present themselves while denying the government the opportunity to concentrate superior military firepower against the insurgents. The NPA currently operates in 67 out of 73 provinces and controls or has strong influence in 18-20 percent of the local communities. The decentralized formal structure it has adopted has afforded the NPA a greater measure of tactical flexibility and a greater chance for success in a country that is splintered along geographic, ethnic, and linguistic lines. The central leadership of the insurgency sets general policy and broad strategic guidelines, but the real power lies with the regional party committees and guerrilla commanders. These latter "no longer [need] to wait for instructions from above, but they [are] encouraged to exercise utmost initiative in producing their own resources and developing new methods of struggle."¹⁵

In its struggle against the government, the NPA has opted to pursue a protracted popular war strategy in the countryside. The NPA has no illusion of defeating the government armed forces on the conventional battlefield. As a result, they have chosen to concentrate on low-level guerrilla warfare and political organization in the countryside. Taking this into account, "progress in the type of war the NPA is waging should not be judged by counting the NPA membership or estimating the balance of military strength vis-a-vis the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines]. More significant is the impact of the armed struggle on the popular consciousness and the territorial spread of revolutionary activities."¹⁶ Political organization at the grass roots level is the major strength of the communist insurgency and is the one factor that has enabled the insurgency to grow despite the "Aquino phenomenon." This grassroots political network is nurtured through a complex series of exoteric appeals and social investigations at the village level that is unmatched to date by a coordinated government effort, particularly in the most isolated areas of the archipelago. According to one analyst with the Defense Intelligence Agency, "the government approach is characterized by a lack of understanding of the nature of the insurgency. Some sectors of the government feel all they have to do is be better than Marcos. Others believe it is a strictly military problem."¹⁷ Such notions reflect a true ignorance of, or a desire to, avoid treating the socioeconomic roots of the problem.

Beyond the restoration of democratic institutions and a routine electoral process, the political response to the insurgent challenge is fraught with troubles. To date no comprehensive, well-integrated counterinsurgency strategy exists at the national level. Political in-fighting within Aquino's cabinet over which road to take to deal with the NPA was particularly bitter during the first 18 months of her administration. Various cabinet reshufflings have eased this problem somewhat; however, there is still little cooperation

among government ministries critical to the counterinsurgency effort (i.e., Health, Agrarian Reform, Rural Resettlement, and Defense).¹⁸ Lack of coordination means that most programs related to the counterinsurgency effort lapse into nothing. A related problem is that there is no government-wide consensus on the seriousness of the communist threat. The insurgency is in the back of the minds of many Filipino politicians -- they are focusing instead on issues such as the bases and the debt and don't seem to realize the true extent of the insurgent threat. The penchant in the congress is to see the insurgency as a local problem or as a problem requiring a purely military solution.¹⁹ As a result, the counterinsurgency effort has been a piecemeal effort left largely in the hands of local officials and military commanders, many of whom have neither the resources nor the talents to tackle the NPA effectively.

To date the Aquino government has chosen to focus most of its attention on the military aspects of the counterinsurgency effort. The tendency is to portray the insurgency in terms of what the NPA is doing militarily (i.e., percentage of new recruits taken in per month, numbers of weapons acquired, aggregate growth in insurgent strength, etc.). As I learned from one knowledgeable source, "These activities fit nicely on to charts and graphs, but they have never been the main thrust of the communists' efforts."²⁰ Statistics don't mean much in insurgent warfare, particularly in the Philippine context in which military commanders have been known to neglect to report communist influence in villages where AFP units are located.²¹ On the government side, there is also little linking of communist political and military efforts. This is a particularly dangerous oversight given the fact that the major strength of the insurgency is its burgeoning grass roots political organization. This undue emphasis on the military aspects of the insurgency at the expense of more fundamental socioeconomic considerations will continue to play into the hands of the insurgents unless the government changes its approach.

In spite of the many problems I've outlined above, the government has scored some major successes against the communist insurgency recently. However, it is important that we evaluate these victories in the context of the overall government response and their impact on NPA operations at the local level. In the first 4 months of 1988, armed forces intelligence operatives and police units conducting raids on suspected communist safehouses in Manila captured more than 20 key insurgent leaders. Those captured during a 29 March 1988 raid included: Benjamin de Vera, Mindanao Commission Chief of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP); Rafael Baylosis, Secretary-General of the CPP; and Romulo Kintanar, Commander of the NPA. More importantly, these three insurgent leaders have been identified as advocates of a more hard-line, aggressive stance towards the Aquino government.²²

Along with these top leaders, approximately 95 computer disks were seized that have revealed a wealth of information on NPA/CPP organization, operations, leadership purges, finances, and the infiltration of various labor unions, student organizations, and church groups. The disks also revealed that "the guerrillas are facing an acute shortage of guns: the captured files record 7,291 for its 24,735 fighters."²³ The success of this operation has produced strains within the insurgent organization, for it is widely believed that such an intelligence coup could not have been pulled off without the presence of government "deep penetration agents" (DPAs) within its ranks. As Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent James Cladob observes, "Suspecting DPAs, the party may now turn upon itself with a rigor that, in Mindanao at least, has led to bloody paranoia and which may preoccupy the party for some time."²⁴

The feeling of success accompanying the above operation must not be taken too far. After all, "the insurgency has weathered worse blows than the 29 March arrests, including the near annihilation of embryonic NPA units during the early 1970's in Northern Luzon."²⁵ The top leadership of the NPA and the CPP has been captured on numerous occasions prior to this. The resilience and decentralized nature of this "hydra-headed" insurgency have proven the keys to its survivability. In spite of the arrests of its national leadership, the NPA's command-and-control links at the local level remain intact as does its grassroots political network. Local guerrilla operations were not affected by the March 1988 arrests. Unfortunately, reading the Manila newspapers during the past 6 months would lead one to believe that the March raid dealt a fatal blow to the insurgency. This is an example of the government's misreading the true nature of the enemy they face.

POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORT

In order to further exacerbate some of the strains presently affecting the cohesion of the insurgent ranks, the Aquino government must act to regain the momentum created by the original "People Power" movement and the initial series of political reforms it undertook. President Aquino deserves high marks for reestablishing the institutional infrastructure for a functioning democracy in the Philippines. The new constitution, overwhelmingly ratified in a national plebiscite, sets up a three-branch system of government characterized by a formal separation of powers and an intricate system of checks and balances. Public accountability of elected officials is formally established in this document as is civilian control over the military. The results of the May 1987 Congressional elections were highly favorable for the Aquino coalition. The fact that 90 percent of the 26.4 million Filipinos eligible actually voted demonstrates the peoples' willingness to give democracy a chance.²⁶ The legal left-wing alliance supported by the

communists in these elections fared very poorly. Although very confident in their ability to win power through the ballot box before the elections, election returns showed that senatorial candidates of the left-wing Alliance for New Politics (ANP) "ran near the bottom of the list and ran no better than a poor third in House races."²⁷ The fact that voters in numerous "NPA-controlled" barrios throughout the country refused to vote for CPP-backed candidates was particularly distressing to Filipino communists.²⁸

Government-backed candidates also won a clear majority of the more than 16,400 provincial and municipal positions in the local elections conducted in January 1988. The government's Commission on Elections reported that approximately 80 percent of all eligible voters participated in these elections, a clear demonstration of the peoples' desire to see democracy reinstated at the grass roots level. These elections symbolize the near completion of the process of rebuilding the democratic institutional fabric in the Philippines and lay the ground for the genuine bureaucratic revamp needed to give locals a stake in the system and root out corruption and inefficiency in many local areas. As Colonel William Berry of the National Defense University sees it, the real importance of these elections is "the establishment of more viable and politically acceptable local governments more effective in filling the current political vacuum and providing the services that will frustrate communist organizational efforts at the local level."²⁹

Although the democratic framework reestablished by the Aquino government in its first 3 years provides hope for a brighter future, many difficulties still remain that are being successfully exploited by the communists. The CPP refers to Aquino as the "Great Pretender" in its most recent propaganda campaign. As correspondent James Clad reports, "The CPP harps incessantly on Aquino's 'reactionary' nature, 'confirmed' by her government's rejection of militant workers' pay demands, slow progress on land reform, a 'series of government revamps [installing] diehard pro-US elements in the cabinet,' and by her encouragement of anti-communist 'vigilante' groups."³⁰

The problem with the Aquino government's newly established democratic infrastructure has to do with the nature of "democracy" in the Philippines. Politics in the Philippines was and is a game of the elites. The recent electoral contests in the Philippines have witnessed the return of family oligarchies and traditional elites who found themselves dealt out of the power game during the Marcos years. In the May 1987 congressional elections, 130 out of 200 newly elected members of the House of Representatives belonged to traditional political families; 90 percent are big landowners.³¹ In addition, according to Professor David Rosenberg, "Of the 24 elected senators, the overwhelming majority are from traditional

political clans who were prominent in the pre-martial law period."³² The January 1988 local elections served to further consolidate the hold in many areas of traditional power brokers over the fledgling democratic institutional framework constructed under the Aquino team.

President Aquino may have prevented the consolidation of this elite lock on power had she been able to rely on a strong political party to assist her in the complicated tasks of policy formulation and implementation. Instead, she had to rely on a rather diverse coalition of businessmen, traditional politicians, and middle-class professionals to carry her into power and help her devise and implement policy. Her dependency on the traditional elites and the strong bases of power they represented grew as President Aquino faced strong opposition from certain sectors of the armed forces and renewed challenges from the armed left during her first 2 years in office. Unfortunately, increased dependency on an entrenched elite whose commitment to serious socioeconomic change is highly questionable casts a shadow on the future of stability in the post-Marcos Philippines.

A closer examination of the realities of the newly reestablished electoral process in the Philippines also casts some aspersions on the effectiveness of the democratic structure put in place under the Aquino government. As I have already discussed, the recent electoral contests in the Philippines have largely been playgrounds of the elites. The people were free to choose mainly from among various elite candidates and "people energy" was not, for the most part, mobilized along class lines; rather, it was mobilized along patron-client, kinship, and regional lines."³³ The electoral success of the traditional power brokers stems largely from their command of the financial resources necessary to organize a campaign, dominate the media, and provide billions of pesos in bribes.

Graft, corruption, and intimidation in various forms have continued to accompany elections in Aquino's Philippines. In the Filipino context, voters tend to play different candidates against one another at polling time, ultimately selecting the one best equipped to deliver spoils. According to one resident of Northern Mindanao, "The idea exists that it's better to keep incumbents in office because they've already filled their pockets -- a new guy would reach deeper into the till."³⁴ This graft and corruption extends to NPA-controlled areas as well. During the May 1987 Congressional elections, in areas characterized by strong communist influence, candidates not favored by the NPA were allowed to campaign only after paying significant sums in extortion money to local communist cadres.³⁵ In addition to these examples of graft and extortion, individual acts of terrorism and intimidation have also proven integral parts of the new electoral process in the Philippines. On the government

side, local warlords have used private armies to influence voter behavior at the ballot box. The NPA has proven equally adept at using intimidation at polling time.

According to one US Government official, "During the January 1988 election campaign, numerous compromises, understandings, and agreements were reached at the local level in which local politicians pledged to look out after NPA interests in return for protection."³⁶ As the mayor of Angeles City is reported to have said, "In these instances, it's better to reason with them than to fight them."³⁷ This willingness of elected officials to cooperate with the NPA at the local level represents a dangerous turn of events. This becomes evident in light of the fact that the effectiveness of the government counterinsurgency depends on the commitment of the political leadership at the local level. A local political leadership co-opted by communist organizational cadres or terrorist cells is in no position to serve as the backbone of the government counterinsurgency effort.

Despite the many shortcomings of the current version of democracy in the Philippines, the democratic reforms put into place by the Aquino government and other personal initiatives undertaken by President Aquino have proven very troublesome for the insurgents. Redemocratization and the "Aquino phenomenon" have produced fissures in the insurgent leadership over the question of how to deal with Aquino and the appropriate tactics to use to attain long-term strategic objectives. The challenge President Aquino now faces is how to perpetuate the macro-level political setbacks suffered by the communists during her first 3 years in power.

Upon coming to power, President Aquino decided to go after soft-core NPA/CPP supporters by adopting a strategy of national reconciliation over military objection vis-a-vis the communist insurgency. As part of this strategy, she offered an amnesty to those insurgents willing to lay down their arms, declared a 60-day ceasefire with the NPA, and entered into negotiations with the insurgents via the legal leftist National Democratic Front (NDF) which serves as a front organization for the communists. As a further gesture of her commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, she released previously captured NPA/CPP cadres including the founding CPP Chairman, Jose Maria Sison, and the original commander of the NPA, Fernabe Buscayno.³⁸

Although many critics condemned Aquino's approach and claimed it allowed the insurgents to regroup unmolested by the AFP and woo the populace through official media channels, I believe the reconciliation approach was both necessary and a net plus for the Aquino government. As Congressman Stephen Solarz, a long-time Aquino supporter, observed: "Aquino's initial negotiation policy with the communists gave her the moral high ground and demonstrated she was interested in pursuing peace."³⁹

By walking out of the peace negotiations following the Aquino government's refusal to share power with them, dismantle American military facilities in the Philippines and rewrite the constitution, the communists demonstrated their total lack of flexibility and willingness to cooperate in a peaceful democratic process. The net result of the Aquino approach was to grant the government the moral authority to adopt a tougher line toward the insurgency following the communist rejection of the negotiation process. Further fragmentation within the NPA/CPP organization also resulted as various regional party and military organs opted to continue negotiations and regional ceasefire agreements with local government officials in defiance of the orders of the national leadership of the insurgency.

President Aquino's popularity and her drive to redemocratize the Philippines have produced further divisions within the insurgent ranks over which road to follow to attain political power. Some elements within the CPP leadership feel that a myopic hard-line approach toward Aquino and continued over emphasis of the armed struggle have produced several disastrous policies (such as the boycott of most of the recent electoral contests and the constitutional referendum) and have cost the CPP the opportunity to come to power much sooner through increased political activity in the urban areas. The boycott decision in particular has caused the insurgency to lose popularity among many left-wing circles, the urban middle class, and soft-core supporters of the insurgency. Dissidents who follow this line of thinking suggest that the political struggle should play the decisive role in the Philippines with the armed struggle assuming a supporting role.

In this context, "guerrilla units [should] be used not to move to higher stages of military development but to heighten the consciousness and morale of the masses for an urban-based uprising."⁴⁰ Many dissidents within the party advocate an even softer line -- abandonment of the armed struggle to work more within the system to gain political power. Proponents of this viewpoint suggest a concentration on political activities focusing on the Partido ng Bayan (which serves as a legal front party for the CPP), the union movement, the urban middle class, and NDF composite organizations. Reconciliation with the "objectively progressive" elements of the Aquino government is also viewed as a pragmatic alternative to form a much broader united front against the "more reactionary elements of the ruling class."⁴¹

The more hard-line elements of the insurgency were very preoccupied by what they considered to be a loss of "revolutionary initiative" following the termination of the cease-fire and negotiations with the Aquino government. As Dr. Larry Nicksch of the Congressional Research Service writes, following the end of the cease-fire "concerns about an erosion of

morale and discipline among rank-and-file party members and guerrilla fighters led to a shift in power within the party leadership toward those individuals more freely committed to 'armed struggle'.⁴² The new leadership opted for a strategy of "demoralization" involving operations against economic targets and stepped-up urban warfare involving the use of "sparrow" assassination teams.

The objectives of this strategy were to weaken middle-class confidence in the Aquino government, prevent economic recovery, discourage new business investment and provoke an overly repressive response on the part of the AFP and police units.⁴³ In a reckless campaign of economic sabotage, the NPA blew up key railroad bridges and power transmission lines, severed oil pipelines, attacked sugar-refinery facilities and several multinational business operations in Luzon.⁴⁴ To complement these activities, sparrow units began a very indiscriminate terror campaign against government officials and members of the military and the police. The size of the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), the NPA urban partisan group operating in Manila, was increased from 60-70 to approximately 200 active members by early 1988.⁴⁵ By January 1989, sparrow units in Manila had assassinated more than 100 government, military, and police officials.⁴⁶

All in all, the increased emphasis in aggressive tactics to include economic sabotage and indiscriminate urban terror have hurt the insurgency in terms of popular support in many areas. The public backlash over the recent wave of sparrow killings has hurt support for communist front organizations in urban areas and has pressed the Aquino government into a consistently more hard-line (but not overly repressive) approach toward the NPA. Support for the insurgency among the rural populace negatively affected by NPA attacks on economic infrastructure targets has also diminished. Finally, the upsurge in more indiscriminate terrorist activities has produced an increase in the numbers and membership of anti-communist vigilante groups who have been very successful in decimating the insurgent ranks in many areas, particularly in Mindanao.

In spite of these setbacks, the insurgency continues to grow. Although the agreement over whether or not to pursue the armed struggle in its various forms is important to those individuals engaged in the debate, it has not proven significantly detrimental to the overall progress of the insurgency. This has to do with the fact that the approaches outlined above are of tactical emphasis only. There is sufficient agreement within the insurgent leadership at all levels as to the long-term objectives of the insurgency to allow room for the various tactical approaches currently being debated. In the end, however, the various tactical experiments involving reconciliation or increased violence will probably give way to a

return to the basics of a Maoist rural guerrilla strategy. This course of action, with its emphasis on political organization in the countryside, would make the insurgents more immune to the type of setbacks they have suffered recently and offers the best chance for long-term success against the Aquino government. Taking this into account, the challenge for the Aquino government is to regain the moral initiative over the insurgents and further exacerbate dissension within their ranks as it did through its initial commitment to serious political reform. The only way to do this is through an equally serious commitment to socioeconomic reform.

SOCIOECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORT

The restoration of democratic institutions at the national and local levels in the Philippines has proven a very significant milestone in the government struggle against the communist insurgency. The restoration of a government with a firm, legitimate political base has given the people hope outside of continued armed struggle. As we have also seen, the problem of how to deal with a popular president and democratic political institutions has served to create potentially exploitable divisions within the insurgent ranks. Unfortunately, restoring political democracy is not enough to stem the tide of a communist insurgency whose socioeconomic roots go back hundreds of years. In fact, restoring democracy may have been the easiest task at hand in overcoming the current political instability in the Philippines.

President Aquino and her government have now reached the point where they have most likely reaped all the benefits possible from the political reforms made during her first 3 years in office. The government must now act to come up with and implement credible and meaningful socioeconomic reforms in order to erode the sources of popular support for the insurgency at the grass-roots level. Strong, determined leadership on Mrs. Aquino's part is the key here. As stated in the FY 1988 Agency for International Development Report to Congress, "President Aquino must convert her significant personal popularity into solid political support and develop and implement a coherent socioeconomic program."⁴⁷ Achieving this in view of the enormous political, economic, and administrative roadblocks she will encounter will be quite difficult. Unfortunately, she cannot afford to fail.

The biggest advantage the insurgents hold in their battle for the hearts and minds of the rural masses is the traditional neglect of the countryside on the part of the central government. According to recent government estimates, more than three-fifths of rural families lived below the official poverty level in 1986.⁴⁸ The rural areas of the Philippines are further characterized by one of the most unequal distributions of income

in all of Asia. In 1985, the top 10 percent of the population held more than 15 times the income of the poorest 10 percent.⁴⁹ The income gap between rural and urban areas is also widening, with rural income averaging only 47 percent of urban income.⁵⁰ Widespread malnutrition and high rates of infant mortality and illiteracy are also common in many areas, particularly among the populations of the more isolated islands such as Negros and Samar. These problems are exacerbated by an annual population growth rate of 2.6 percent which is adding over 1.5 million people to the total population each year.⁵¹ In light of these problems, the return to power of the traditional economic elites and the urban middle class under the latest version of Filipino democracy have fueled the communist claim that a change in leadership in Manila doesn't equate to a change in the official attitude toward the rural poor.

Some analysts argue that nothing short of a full-fledged social revolution will do to eliminate centuries-old socioeconomic inequities. Fred Brown of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argues this point:

Philippine society is feudal -- that's what causes the insurgency. There was an electoral coup, and a transition to democracy, yes, but the society remains feudal, corrupt, and inequitable. The question is now whether Aquino will take charge and lead a revolution which the majority of Filipinos want. It's a question of who's going to lead it, the Communists or Mrs. Aquino or someone who takes over from Mrs. Aquino.⁵²

I would argue that things need not be taken this far. In the Philippine context, social revolution would be a most bloody affair and would most likely bring about the final destruction of the very fragile democratic framework established over the past 3 years. As an alternative to social revolution, the Aquino government must demonstrate that it is willing and able to develop and implement meaningful reform. At the same time, a concerted effort to fight graft, corruption, and government abuses at all levels must be undertaken. Finally, the government must also take positive steps to establish a presence at the local level and provide needed services to the rural poor. Bard O'Neill considers this last point to be critical: "Where the government ability to establish an efficient administration relatively free of corruption is lacking, it runs a grave risk of seeing the insurgents implanting their own organizational structures and gaining momentum, developments which will become more costly to overcome as time goes by."⁵³ In short, "the communists are where the government isn't, and if [they] can do things for the people that the government can't, they will continue to be successful."⁵⁴

Mrs. Aquino and her government will face numerous stumbling blocks in any attempt they make to follow the recommendations outlined above. In fact, the macro-level economic recovery I described at the beginning of this paper hasn't been translated into a perception of improvement in the rural areas. According to Mr. Frank Kennefik of the Agency for International Development, "Government programs to get things done at the local level exist on paper, but there is little real action in terms of implementation."⁵⁵ One reason for this failure at implementation is resistance to substantive socioeconomic reform on the part of the traditional elites. Michael Morfitt of the Agency for International Development explained this as a defensive attitude designed to prevent the "unleashing of social forces outside their control."⁵⁶ Instead, the elites prefer a "trickle-down approach" to socioeconomic development, an approach which unfortunately can't compete with the exoteric propaganda and actions of the communist insurgents.

The second problem inherent in trying to implement real socioeconomic reform in the Philippines is the lack of an efficient administrative system reaching down from Manila to the local level that would enable the line departments to deliver goods and services to poor villages with any regularity. Instead, according to the Agency for International Development:

A system of informal considerations has remained deeply entrenched, whereby personal gain is often placed above concerns for governmental efficiency. Implementation of government programs is slow, even when funding is available and programs are highly touted such as the Comprehensive Economic Development Program that was to result in rapid infusion of capital into the rural areas.⁵⁷

Although many government officials consider socioeconomic development a resource problem, this is not exactly the case. The real problem lies with the distribution system. As a recent survey in The Economist magazine points out, "A look at the aid books shows that \$2 billion in official development assistance is unused. Some dollars may be left idle because the Central Bank does not have its counterpart funds available to meet its share of financing projects; most are simply stuck in a pipeline of Philippine bureaucracy. In 1986, donors committed \$3.2 billion, but only \$770 million was actually used; in 1987, commitments reached \$3.5 billion; of which \$929 million was used."⁵⁸

The distribution system is so bad that many goods earmarked for local development projects may sit in a Manila warehouse for up to a year.⁵⁹ Little accountability is maintained over funds and goods that are, in fact, released for local development projects. Released funds are subject to the demands of a well-lubricated system of graft and corruption. According to one US

Government official, "Probably less than 10 percent of the funds earmarked for a local construction project ever makes it through the system."⁶⁰ The classic example of the inefficiencies of this system is the case of a highway on the island of Mindanao that has been paid for three times now but has never been built!⁶¹ Such examples of systemic failure have made the national ministries very reluctant to release money and delegate important decisionmaking authority to the local level.

Failures in the system have further contributed to the neglect of rural infrastructure, health and education services, and small-scale business operations. The rural transportation network is poorly designed and poorly maintained and inhibits the flow of goods and services to and from the countryside. According to a recent article in the Manila Star,

. . . there is apparently little or no transportation planning in relation to agriculture such that in some areas, roads are being constructed away from market or production centers. . . . the distribution of rural to urban infrastructures in the past has been highly politicized, that is, roads, seaports, or airport improvements or construction were based on how many votes it could bring come election time and not how many tons of agricultural produce could be brought to the market . . . these could have been located in places where they could be used to service the transport demand of farmers.⁶²

The same article points out that current funding earmarked for the maintenance of village roads most affecting populated rural areas is only 35 to 40 percent of that actually needed.⁶³ Transportation delays caused by inadequate road design and maintenance have resulted in higher costs to both the producer and the consumer.

Credit services to support small business operations and agricultural activities are also sorely lacking in the countryside. Failure of the central government to provide a "safety net" to cover loans made to small peasant farmers and businessmen has caused regional commercial banks to shy away from direct loans in the countryside. Once again, the problem seems to be a complicated administrative system that seems to "gobble-up" loan requests for small-medium scale business and agricultural enterprises. Manila newsman Dennis Fetalino sums up the predicament in the following manner:

The banks in Manila are virtually bulging with loanable funds and the farmer-producers in the rural areas are practically begging for start-up funds with which to finance a backyard poultry farm, a cottage industry, fruit orchard, and similar small-scale projects. But

the outcry in the provinces is that the cost of funds became unavailable to them given their collateral constraints. Thus the call for secure government insurance to cover a portion of banks' risks on their exposures to small, uncollateralized borrowers.⁶⁴

In this latter case, cutting through some layers of bureaucratic red tape could well lead to small-scale, but important economic recovery in many areas directly affected by the communist insurgency. Small-scale victories of this type, when multiplied across several regions, will serve to undercut communist propaganda efforts and demonstrate the government's commitment to tackle basic socioeconomic problem areas.

One area that demonstrates the difficulties of developing and implementing meaningful reforms in the Philippines is the land reform question. In fact, this issue has been regarded by most observers as the most important single gauge of the Aquino government's commitment to substantive socioeconomic change. A credible land reform program is essential to close the widening gap between rich and poor in the Philippines and to undercut one of the most important elements of the NPA/CPP propaganda war in the countryside.

According to official government estimates, 90 percent of the usable land in the Philippines is owned by a mere 10 percent of the population.⁶⁵ Two-thirds of the population lives in the countryside, where the majority engaged in agricultural activities do so as tenants or wage laborers on large estates.⁶⁶ Rural poverty, particularly in sugar-producing areas such as the island of Negros, is particularly acute. Here, the median family income in a good month is about \$85; in the off-season months, since no work is available, the typical family income drops to zero.⁶⁷ The regional insurgent leadership has been adept at exploiting this situation to their advantage. Local insurgent commanders have exercised a "'land-to-the-tiller' policy in which they have seized idle or abandoned holdings without compensation and have distributed them to rural families. Their message is addressed to the great majority of farm workers who work on land they do not own as low-paid laborers or as share-croppers who give their landlords as much as half their crop."⁶⁸

Although land reform has been a much-stated goal of the Aquino government, the national leadership has had a very difficult time translating its words into action. The opposition of vested interests, lack of political will, bureaucratic incompetence, and lack of funding lie at the heart of the matter. Although President Aquino pledged swift action on a comprehensive land reform during her campaign, her circle of closest advisers went through more than 20 draft decrees before arriving at a mutually acceptable scheme for reform. In the end, 18 months passed before President Aquino finally signed an executive order

calling for a redistribution of land to the landless. Unfortunately, her July 1987 decree left essential issues such as land-retention limits and timetables for implementation in the hands of a congress dominated by the traditional landed elites. According to one author, these are the same landed elites "that aborted every land reform initiative undertaken before the advent of the martial law administration of Ferdinand Marcos."⁶⁹

To its credit, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) legislation finally passed by the Congress in June 1988 goes further than any previous attempt at land reform in Philippine history but contains several loopholes which ultimately benefit present landholders. Although heralded by President Aquino as a "tolerable compromise" which would enable a "radical leap in agricultural productivity" and "uplift the Filipino masses from their ancient poverty," CARP's 10-year implementation timetable, its emphasis on compensation and litigated appeals, and the lands it exempts from reform put the government's commitment to serious socioeconomic reform very much in doubt. Under the provisions of the new legislation, all agricultural lands are potentially subject to redistribution; however, the break up of private estates is left for last. Unfortunately, usable public lands are not extensive. The individual retention limits established are five hectares for the landowner, plus three hectares for each of his children over 15 years of age.

Critics argue that this limit is very generous given the large size of a typical Filipino family and the fact that the model farm size in the Philippines is 2 to 5 acres.⁷⁰ Even more telling is the provision that landowners and their children have the right of first choice as to which portion of their present lands they will retain. Finally, the snail's pace of the new reform will be slowed even further because CARP leaves the amount of appropriate land compensation up to the Department of Agrarian Reform, the landowner, and the courts. As correspondent James Clad explains it, "In a litigious society like the Philippines, court wrangles could keep the Department of Agrarian Reform, the government's executive agency, 'tied up for decades.'"⁷¹

In spite of its faults, a fully implemented CARP could benefit as many as 1.5 million landless families and give land titles to 800,000 small farmers in the Philippines.⁷² However, full implementation of CARP remains very much in doubt. Hacenderos opposed to the legislation have formed well-paid private armies to keep government "land reformers" out. One group of landowners on the island of Negros has formed the "Movement for an Independent Negros" and has threatened armed uprising and secession if the government tries to implement CARP in its area.⁷³ Another problem facing CARP is funding. The government says it will need \$2.5 billion in compensation funds to fully implement the legislation.⁷⁴ The money needed is to

come from foreign aid, sales of government assets, and the recovery of funds taken out of the country by Marcos and his cronies. It is highly unlikely that these three sources will ever produce the funds needed. The grim reality is that proceeds from asset sales are tied up in bureaucratic infighting, little of the Marcos booty has been returned to Manila, and foreign donors have thus far been unwilling to fund land compensation programs.⁷⁵ A mere \$136 million is all that is available to fund the first year of CARP.⁷⁶

As if all these problems weren't enough, implementation of CARP will place a severe strain on the government's inefficient rural bureaucratic infrastructure and its severely depleted financial resource base. To be truly successful, CARP must be complemented by numerous projects aimed at teaching modern production techniques and improving the basic rural infrastructure to allow new landholders a chance for survival. "Peasants born to feudal dependency will not suddenly learn the skills of how to raise finance, when to plant, and how to sell."⁷⁷ The necessary training will somehow have to be provided and funded by the Philippine government. Infrastructure projects to be funded in a similar manner would necessarily include better roads linking rural areas to markets, communal irrigation systems, rural electrification, etc. Additionally, small loans and other forms of credit would have to be made available to finance the purchases of seed and fertilizer and serve as a buffer during drought years. These projects and programs presuppose a functioning financial system in the rural areas. The problem is that only about 20 percent of the 1,000 rural banks in the Philippines are in any position to participate in a scheme of such grand design.⁷⁸

In sum, the issue of land reform presents a very perplexing problem for the Aquino government. A credible program is necessary to demonstrate a commitment to real socioeconomic change; however, the grim reality is that a comprehensive, equitable land distribution program is virtually impossible to attain in the Philippine context. Nevertheless, the attempt must be made, for to acknowledge reality in this case is to cede valuable ground to the communist insurgency. However modest the actual results of CARP turn out to be, the fact that the government is paying attention to an issue of considerable importance to the Filipino peasantry may yet satisfy a grievance successfully exploited by communist cadres to this point.

Government efforts in the socioeconomic arena represent the critical factor in determining whether the government will ultimately prevail over the armed left. As I was reminded by one official in our Department of Defense, "Full-time government presence and administration of services at the village level is the key to the counterinsurgency effort in the Philippines."⁷⁹ Government recognition of this fact constitutes the first step in

the right direction. President Aquino seems to have taken this first step. In a recent interview she highlighted the "need to enhance the 'political will' of those in government, notably local government; towards using power responsibly to carry out programs and deliver the needed services to our people."⁸⁰

Hopefully, more government involvement will mean more attention to infrastructure and small-scale industries and, hence, more jobs at the local level. Additionally, the government must be willing to go beyond its traditional focus on the Manila area and central Luzon and devote resources to areas where the problems are. Gaps between central Luzon and the poorest islands must be eliminated. The rural banking system needs to be built up, as do small-scale businesses. All of the above measures will require pressure from above on the civil service bureaucracy, close oversight on the part of the central government, and more coordination between national ministries and local governments. Although this "top-down approach" will require much time and patience, it is the only way possible to rebuild an infrastructure destroyed by the more than 20 years of endemic corruption which characterized the Marcos era. It is also the only way to put to rest the notion that the NPA is the only organization "that seems to get things done" in the countryside.⁸¹

MILITARY ASPECTS OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORT

Before assessing the military aspects of the Aquino government's counterinsurgency effort, a word of caution is necessary. It must be remembered that although the NPA has developed into a fairly impressive military force over the past two decades, its fight for political control of the Philippines cannot be won on the battlefield. Ultimate success for the insurgents will depend on government failure to follow through on fundamental political and socioeconomic reforms at the local level. In military terms, the best the AFP can hope for is to contain the insurgency at a relatively low level of violence and provide security at the local level so that people will regain confidence in the government and development projects can be carried out unhampered by the communists. Successful military action against the NPA is meaningless if the communists can return to an area after the AFP leaves. Fortunately, the present AFP leadership appears to be aware of this situation. As AFP Commander General Mariano Adalam recently said, "The military has recognized that the crucial battlefield in this protracted, low-level war is not in the jungles but among the population that forms the insurgency's mass base."⁸²

The difficulties experienced by the Filipino military in developing an effective counterinsurgency capability can be traced to its politicization during the Marcos years, poor civil-military relations, deficient operational strategies, and major

resource problems. Since the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos in February, 1986, the AFP has spent more time and effort trying to cure its own ailments than it has fighting the NPA. The AFP is plagued by inefficiency, corruption, and an abusive reputation spawned during 20 years of martial law. Never a very professional or disciplined force, the AFP was thoroughly politicized during the Marcos years. Marcos controlled officer promotions and key assignments, loyalty and region of birth being much more important than professional competency. The military largely served as a private security guard for Marcos, and officers were called upon to manage newspapers, utility and transportation companies, industries, and various commercial enterprises during this period -- posts that did much to line their pockets but little in the way of training them to deal with actual threats to national security. The "proper reserve" of the military was beyond definition during these years, as "Marcos used the military to relocate squatters, enforce commodity prices, supervise elections, and administer the justice system."⁸³

The growth of military strength and autonomy during the martial law period made it difficult for many officers in the top leadership ranks of the AFP to accept a return to the idea of civilian supremacy under President Aquino. This became quite evident as military malcontents vented their frustrations over the government's initial soft-line counterinsurgency policy and seeming inattention to military needs in six unsuccessful coup attempts during Mrs Aquino's first 18 months in office. The extent of the deterioration within the ranks of the AFP leadership was best summed up by then Defense Minister Rafael Ileto in February, 1987: "Before I got this job, I thought it would take about a year or two to reform the military, unite everybody, and weed out the bad ones. Now I'm convinced it will take 20 years -- a generation."⁸⁴

In addition to weakening its professional fabric, the Marcos years also brought the AFP a reputation of abuse and corruption which has continued to negatively color civil-military relations in the counterinsurgency effort. Counterinsurgency policy under Marcos included the forced relocation of people from areas under supposed communist influence to secure concentrations (clusterings) and extensive cordon and search operations in villages suspected to be sympathetic to the NPA. In its massive sweeps of communist-affected areas, "the military tended in most cases to treat anyone who was believed to have contact with the NPA as part of the CPP/NPA organization, which meant that a very large number of people were subject to harassment, threats, arrest, torture, and 'salvaging' (arbitrary killing)."⁸⁵ Such actions served to increase the size of the insurgents' mass base and otherwise alienated many neutral peasants who had no real desire to support the communists. This is true because "most reported cases of abuse involved local people who ordinarily have

a wide range of relatives and friends in the [village] and beyond. Thus, an incident of torture or execution of just one person had the potential to turn an entire community against the AFP."⁸⁶ In a similar manner, AFP torture and execution of guerrilla deserters and informants severely crippled the credibility of the government's amnesty program and hindered effective tactical intelligence gathering operations at the local level.

Widespread corruption is another factor that has negatively impacted the AFP's image in civilian eyes. The list of petty abuses and crimes committed by AFP and local defense force personnel during the Marcos years is practically endless: "the stealing of chickens and pigs by patrolling troops, violence and criminality by drunken Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF) personnel, extortion of businessmen and ordinary citizens by soldiers, and corrupt leaks between local commanders and criminal syndicates, powerful businessmen, or political figures."⁸⁷ Military taxation of local businessmen for purposes of "protection" made the military no better than the communists. In fact, when "faced with pressure to support the military as well as the insurgents, it is understandable that many turn toward the latter -- if only because they are often better disciplined and at least appear to be more concerned with local grievances."⁸⁸

Although there are several reasons that account for the abusive and corrupt nature of the AFP (particularly in the Marcos era), none is more important than the resources problem. The AFP is among the most poorly funded militaries in all of Asia, typically funded at less than 2 percent of the annual Gross National Product. Food, medicine, and clothing have traditionally been in short supply. According to one US Congressional report, the basic pay of most enlisted men in the AFP in 1985 was in the range of \$38 to \$44 per month.⁸⁹ This doesn't even allow for a basic level of subsistence for a lower ranking military family. The bottom line here is that soldiers in the field will steal pigs and chickens and loot stores if they have no field rations, little money and a typically large family at home to support. In this context, fighting the NPA is a low priority for the common soldier. In fact, one observer in Mindanao explained to me that common soldiers often sell new shipments of equipment to the NPA, with hand grenades going on sale in open markets for 100 pesos apiece when new supplies arrive!⁹⁰ The saddest part of this story is that "without an improvement in the resources problem, punishment of offenders and a tightening of discipline likely would reduce these practices but probably on a temporary basis and at the cost of lower morale."⁹¹

In addition to contributing toward the very low morale and inclination toward petty abuses on the part of the common soldier, the resources problem has compounded the difficulty of mounting a successful counterinsurgency effort at the local level. In short, lack of funds, supplies, and equipment virtually ruled out an effective village civic action program during the Marcos years. Without civic action programs, the AFP could hardly hope to pull the rug out from under the communist organizational efforts in the more remote areas of the country.

Lack of adequate medical supplies and treatment facilities has also had a resoundingly negative impact on troop morale within the AFP. The killed-to-wounded ratio in the AFP is abnormally high due to lack of proper medical care, medicines, basic first aid training and treatment facilities. Lack of ambulances in maneuver battalions and a helicopter medical evacuation capability also contributes to the high mortality rate. The consensus within the ranks of the AFP is that if someone becomes wounded, his chances of recovery are slim-to-none. This results in a tremendous morale problem and lack of vigor in prosecuting combat operations against the NPA.

Combat operations against the NPA are also hindered by serious deficiencies in vehicles, helicopters, spare parts, and radio communications and individual combat equipment. According to the 1985 Congressional report mentioned earlier, "The result of transportation shortages is a military that is footbound, restricted to defending fixed positions, unable to react to insurgent initiatives, and unable to act if patrols or other reconnaissance units should locate NPA units."⁹² Spare parts shortages have presently put more than half the fixed wing aircraft and helicopters in the Philippine Air Force out of commission for maintenance reasons.⁹³ Hence, ground units engaging the NPA are often unable to secure the close air support or aerial reinforcement they require. Shortages of back-pack radios mean a limited capability to call for such support or coordinate simultaneous attacks on rebel positions in any case. In many instances these resource problems stem not from the non-availability of individual combat equipment items or spare parts, but from the inefficiencies of the logistics system. Often times red tape and corruption within the logistics pipeline simply don't allow equipment and supplies stockpiled in Manila to make it down to the combat units.

In addition to the resources problem described above, the AFP suffers from serious leadership deficiencies and a mentality unsuited to counterinsurgency operations. Combat operations that are mounted against the NPA are often conducted in a slipshod manner. Ineffective leadership, lack of training, and a limited tactical intelligence gathering capability are the primary reasons behind this. Enforcement of discipline and leadership standards is virtually nonexistent within the AFP; officers

simply don't get reprimanded for gross leadership failures on the battlefield.⁹⁴ The way a unit operates in the field depends on the skills and dynamism of individual commanders. Unfortunately, many troop units are led by officers concerned less with fighting the NPA than with siphoning off funds, selling their troops' services to local landlords, or muscling their way into local business and crime syndicates.⁹⁵ Others generate stories of success against the NPA and fake status reports so they can be reassigned to more desirable posts, preferably in the Metro Manila area. A successful military counterinsurgency effort is impossible without competent, honest, and professional military commanders at all levels.

A better complement of junior officers must be accompanied by a better training program for all AFP combat personnel. This includes a shift in the orientation of training from a conventional warfare scenario and a 9-to-5 syndrome to counterinsurgency operations and an emphasis on day/night patrolling. Large sweeps through enemy-affected areas and search-and-destroy operations must be abandoned in favor of programs that concentrate on small unit operations and security at the grass-roots level.

Despite the bleak picture I've painted above, it should be recognized that the Aquino government and the AFP leadership have made considerable progress in correcting deficiencies within the Filipino military over the past 3 years. The most important factor in the military leadership's favor is recognition of the severity of the threats posed by the communist insurgency and of the problems within the ranks of the AFP itself. According to one US Government official, "The new AFP leadership understands that the insurgency is a political war and that the government must get involved in the countryside in a serious way before AFP military operations against the NPA can be truly effective."⁹⁶ The new top level AFP leadership (Generals De Villa and Adelan) are less political and more apt to make needed changes in AFP operations and organization than their predecessors.⁹⁷ General Mariano Adelan, having earned a reputation for success against the NPA in Mindanao, was an excellent choice to fill the Army's top command position. He is big on leadership by example and understands the true nature of what it takes to mount a successful counterinsurgency campaign.

Importantly, this increased dynamism at the top of the AFP leadership hierarchy is slowly finding its way down the rank structure. All "overstaying generals" from the Marcos era have now been retired. This move created room for the promotion of officers more experienced in counterinsurgency operations. Lower level leadership is also improving within the AFP. According to one US Joint US Military Advisory Group official, "Younger, more professional majors and lieutenant colonels are being selected for battalion commands."⁹⁸ A new battalion commander school is

currently being set up to more effectively train the mid-level leadership within the AFP combatant commands. At the small-unit level, pressure is being placed on company commanders and platoon leaders to get their troops out and take the fight to the NPA. The newer members of the company grade officer corps (beginning approximately with the Military Academy class of 1983) also seem to reflect a greater sense of patriotism and nationalism than their predecessors in the Marcos years.

Accompanying these changes in leadership is the reorganization of the AFP to enhance its counterinsurgency capability. The 13 former regional military commands have been reorganized into five area unified commands to provide for greater command and central and decentralized execution of counterinsurgency operations. Additionally, Marcos' Presidential Security Command has been deactivated and other headquarters have been reduced to allow the transfer of more troops, vehicles, and equipment to field units where they are sorely needed. Most of the AFP's division and brigade headquarters have also been relocated to the countryside.

In another positive note, the AFP's human rights record has improved significantly over the past 3 years. Several factors account for this improved record to include improved training and logistics support for troops in the field, heightened command awareness, an increase in combat pay and a 60 percent across-the-board pay raise for all ranks. Although progress in the area of human rights has been considerable, continued attention needs to be focused on cleaning up remaining problems. One that should be mentioned is that fact that no military or police official has ever been convicted of a human rights offense. As Amnesty International reports, "In the few areas where court proceedings have been initiated, witnesses have been harassed, arrested, or even killed."⁹⁹ Although this situation represents a blot on the government's credibility, the delicate nature of current civil-military relations in the Philippines will most likely preclude positive action to remedy this situation in the near future.

Another area that has received major attention recently is improving the equipment and morale of the average soldier in the field. Deliveries of individual combat equipment items via the US military assistance pipeline have improved the quality of life of the individual soldier as well as enhanced the overall capability of the AFP. According to a 30 March 1988 statement by Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage, "In the last 6 months alone, 160,000 sets of uniforms, more than 60,000 pairs of boots, and 1,000 platoon medical kits have been delivered, reflecting our priority on improving the equipment of the individual soldier in the field."¹⁰⁰ In line with our desire to produce an improvement in the AFP's ability to "move, shoot, and communicate," other equipment deliveries in 1987 included 550 tactical radios, 1500 jeeps and trucks, 10 helicopters, and a

large number of machine guns, M-16 rifles, and ammunition.¹⁰¹ The most notable change with respect to the above equipment is that it is no longer channeled exclusively to Manila-based units. However, much more work needs to be done to build a military logistics infrastructure from the top down to make sure vital equipment is not bottlenecked in a bureaucratic labyrinth.

The most challenging problem currently facing the AFP counterinsurgency effort is the establishment of security at the grass-roots level. It should be remembered that the NPA/CPP insurgency is first and foremost a struggle for political control of the rural villages in the Philippines. Unfortunately, it is precisely this area that has given all recent Filipino governments a severe headache. The root of the problem lies with corrupt local officials, human rights abuses on the part of the CHDF, and lack of properly trained and organized local police and military units.

The key to the military counterinsurgency effort at the local level is to provide security for government officials and ordinary citizens once units of the AFP have rid an area of guerrillas and have departed. In its newest approach to this problem, the AFP is currently employing "Special Operations Teams" (SOT) to integrate military and community actions and long-term security considerations. The strategy of the SOT concept involves an attempt to duplicate the insurgents' method of gaining popular support at the local level. In the first phase of the process, a 20-30 man SOT enters a village and immediately undertakes an in-depth investigation of grievances held by the populace and identifies and attempts to convert communist supporters. Through a combination of dialogue, anti-communist lectures and delivery of needed services, the population is slowly won over to the government's side.

Next, local support groups are established to provide intelligence on NPA activities in the area.¹⁰² To sum up their role to this point, "the SOTs, if they succeed, will put the military in an essentially political role, countering the insurgents' political operatives and serving as the agent to bring in public services."¹⁰³ After the guerrillas and their support infrastructure are eliminated, the SOT concentrates on organizing a community self-defense unit that will eventually take over the long-term security mission. This unit, known as the CAFGUA (Citizen Armed Forces Geographic Unit), is composed of village residents who will be much better trained than their present counterparts in CHDF units. Once the CAFGUA is trained and important local development projects are underway, the SOT leaves the village (with the exception of one or two members who will remain as advisers) to start work in another communist-affected area.

Successful implementation of the SOT program will take a great deal of time. The advantage of this program over the support of anti-communist vigilante groups is that the government maintains more positive control over the counterinsurgency effort. The danger is that the time required for successful implementation of the entire program may ultimately cause it to fizzle out for lack of funds and attention. It may well degenerate into an immense paperwork exercise. In any event, the success of the program will ultimately depend on the effectiveness of the local political leadership and military commanders. Failure to eliminate corruption or provide real development at the village level will no doubt allow the NPA to return once the SOTs leave.

UNITED STATES ASSISTANCE

The root causes of the insurgency problem in the Philippines require home-grown cures. Although continued US aid will remain critical to the government counterinsurgency effort in the future, the US Government cannot, under any circumstances, appear to be the spearhead of this effort. In the words of retired Army General Richard G. Stillwell:

It's a Philippine problem requiring solutions that are Philippine in design and conduct; our assistance can only reinforce domestic programs. Thus, the heart of the matter is the government's willingness to make defeating the insurgency a top national priority; develop an interdepartmental game plan; and harness the entire bureaucracy to the resulting tasks under clear-cut civilian police, and military management.¹⁰⁴

Though the brunt of the effort must lie with the Filipinos themselves, the United States does have several more subtle options available to assist the Aquino government in its fight against the communist insurgents. On a more general level, the first step we need to take is to encourage the Filipino government to take the insurgent threat more seriously across the board. This means urging tougher security laws so that captured guerrillas aren't freed due to loopholes in the judicial system, stressing accountability and discipline on the part of government officials, and stressing the importance of putting people with integrity into important positions.¹⁰⁵ According to Congressman Stephen Solarz, "The key here is getting the Filipino government to realize that the main problem in dealing with the insurgency is not a military one; solutions will require major resource and policy changes on the part of the civilian government as well."¹⁰⁶ To help Mrs. Aquino better deal with the insurgents, the US Government must also continue its unqualified support for democracy in the Philippines. United States Embassy backing bolstered Aquino's position during five coup attempts in her

first 18 months in office. The Filipino military must continue to be reminded that US aid will be cut off following any successful overthrow of the Aquino government.

As in the long run the insurgency can only be defeated through sustained economic growth and development that is felt at the local level, a continued flow of resources from external sources is critical. Fortunately for the Aquino government, to date numerous countries have been very forthcoming in demonstrating their commitment to democracy in the Philippines through generous official economic aid packages. For example, foreign assistance commitments in 1987 totaled approximately \$14 billion, including \$379.5 million in US economic assistance.¹⁰⁷ Aid commitments for 1988 are even higher, totaling approximately \$2.1 billion, including \$370.2 million in US economic assistance and a Japanese yen loan package valued at \$600 million.¹⁰⁸ United States aid has also increased significantly over the past 2 years in an effort to "strengthen Aquino's hand in the delicate early stages of her presidency and to boost American popularity."¹⁰⁹ A breakdown of US economic assistance figures for 1983-1988 is contained in the table on the next page.

The assistance of the United States and other international donors is vital to economic recovery in the Philippines and must be continued. In this area, the challenge for the Bush administration will be to take the lead in rounding up aid from other prospective donors. The starting point for this effort should be the multilateral assistance plan (the so-called Mini-Marshall Plan) proposed by Representatives Stephen Solarz (D-NY) and Jack Kemp (R-NY) and Senators Alan Cranston (D-CA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN). This proposal envisions a 5-10 year program worth approximately \$10-15 billion to provide for economic development and political stability. About 20 percent of this sum would come from the United States, while the remaining 80 percent would come from Japan, Western Europe, and capital-rich nations of East Asia. The proposal is multidimensional in that it is concerned with improvements in trade, private investment, and debt negotiations. In practical terms this idea incorporates the burden-sharing principle and would most likely enjoy considerable bipartisan support in the US Congress.¹¹⁰

However, if any such multilateral assistance project is to be truly effective, careful direction and monitoring of the end use of the funding involved must be made. Donor aid under this program must be tied to specific development projects to tackle infrastructure problems and address grass roots poverty and land reform. Funding in the form of grant aid or general budget support would most likely never make it down to the local level. To bypass the choking layer of bureaucracy at the national level, foreign donors must be allowed to go directly to provincial and local governments to formulate investment schemes and plans for development projects. Although such activities touch upon the

UNITED STATES ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
(\$ Millions)

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Development Assistance	36.8	32.1	34.4	38.6(1)	12.0	40.0
Economic Support Funds	50.0	50.0	140.0	300.0(2)	250.0	174.0 (5)
PL 480 Title I	-	-	40.0	32.3	0.0	(4)
PL 480 Title II	17.7	25.6	11.5	8.3	55.6	17.7
Section 416	-	-	-	-	51.6(3)	(4)
Disaster Assistance	-	2.0	0.4	-	-	-
TOTAL	104.5	109.7	225.9	379.5	370.2	231.7

Notes:

(1) Includes reobligation of \$22.7 of previous year's funds.

(2) Includes reobligation of \$80.4 of previous year's funds.

(3) Includes \$18.2 million sugar quota compensation shipped in early FY87.

(4) Section 416 and PL480 Title I allocations not yet determined.

(5) Includes \$50 million for land reform based on fulfillment of certain conditions.

Source: Unclassified State Department Briefing Paper, "US Assistance to the Philippines," dated January 1988.

sensitivities of national sovereignty, they are essential if donor aid is to make a serious difference at the local level. If implemented in such a manner, a US-sponsored multinational donor effort would no doubt go a long way in tackling the underlying socioeconomic problems fueling the communist insurgency.

In addition to economic assistance, continued US military aid is essential to the conduct of the military counterinsurgency effort and the improvement of AFP combat capability. The Philippines is currently the largest US security assistance recipient in East Asia. With the coming to power of the Aquino

government, US military aid has increased significantly, with the United States currently funding over 80 percent of the AFP budget for procurement, operations, and maintenance.¹¹¹ The following table summarizes the US security assistance program for the Philippines for the period FY86-91:

UNITED STATES SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO THE PHILIPPINES
(\$ Millions)

	FY86	FY87	FY88	FY89	FY90/91*
Foreign Military Sales	14.4	-	-	-	-
Military Assistance Program	88.3	100.0	125.0	125.0	200.0
Int'l Military Education and Training Program	2.3	2.6	2.6**	2.6**	2.6
TOTAL	105.0	102.6	127.6	127.6	202.6

* Represents FY 90/91 "best efforts" annual pledge given by President Reagan in October 1988 in conjunction with the MBA review.

** Represents professional military education and tactical training for approximately 574 personnel per year.

Source: US State Department unclassified documented dated 11/88.

The major focus of the US security assistance program is improvement of the AFP's tactical mobility capability in support of counterinsurgency operations. Another major concern is individual soldier support items and equipment needed to improve morale and bolster combat readiness. The following table provides a summary of US security assistance deliveries to the Philippines during the period February 1986 to May 1988:

SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO THE PHILIPPINES SINCE 1986

	QTY DELIVERED	FY88 PIPELINE	FY89 PIPELINE
GROUND VEHICLES			
-- 2 1/2 TON TRUCKS (USED)	615		
-- 2 1/2 TON TRUCKS (NEW)	150	138	
-- 2 1/2 DUMP TRUCKS	25		
-- ENGINEERING EQUIP (DOZER, GRADER)	73	6	
-- M880 PICK UPS (USED)	99	401	
-- V-150 ARM CAR	25	10	
-- JEEPS (USED)	1201		
-- HUMMV		151	
- TOTALS	2188	706	0

AIR ASSETS

- ROTARY WING			
-- UH-1 HELICOPTERS	28		
-- UH-1 HELICOPTERS (US DEPOT REPAIR)		8	
-- UH-1 HELICOPTERS (OVL IN RP)	12	0	
-- MD-500 GUNSHIP HELICOPTERS		10	20
-- SUBTOTAL	40	18	20
- FIXED WING			
-- T-33 JETS	7		
-- F-5A (TAIWAN)		4	
- SUBTOTALS	7	4	0

NAVAL ASSETS

- SHIP ACQUISITION			
-- PATROL CRAFT FAST			5
-- LANDING CRAFT (TAIWAN)		6	
- TOTALS	0	6	5

CCIE

UNIFORMS	224498		
BOOTS	34178	116668	

WEAPONS/AMMUNITION

-- .45 CALIBER PISTOLS	10000	2500	
-- 40MM GRENADES	50040	37224	
-- 81MM MORTAR	3160	104	
-- M-16 MAGAZINE ASSY	250000		
-- M60 MACHINE GUN	740	661	
-- M60E3 MACHINE GUN		500	
-- 90MM RECOILLES RIFLES	0	180	525

COMMUNICATION EQUIP

-- PRC-775	1550	0	1900
-- HARRIS HF RADIOS	100	32	
-- SUBTOTALS	1650	32	1900

MEDICAL EQUIP

-- AIDMAN MEDICAL BAGS (AFP CX'D 4000)	1000	0	
-- AIDMAN MEDICAL BAGS (TAIWAN)		12000	

MISCELLANEOUS

-- FWRD AIR REF EQUIP SETS	15		
-- HIPWR BINOCULARS	1659		
-- NIGHT VISION GOGGLES	100		

Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs.

Current levels of US security assistance have allowed the AFP to make some progress in terms of combat capability, mobility, communications and individual troop morale. However, more assistance will be necessary if the AFP is to be successful

in containing the military advances of the insurgency. We must continue to focus our military assistance on mobility items and human needs and not try and seduce the AFP with expensive, high-tech equipment ill-suited for the job. The tendency to over rely on helicopters is a good case in point here. Although helicopters provide certain capabilities such as allowing the AFP to strike at guerrillas where they attempt to mass, sustain its forces in the field, and extend the range of the combat operations, they are expensive to maintain and can displace emphasis from the ground war and village security. As one Colonel in the AFP summed up the problem: "Once you introduce the troops to helicopters, they never want to walk again; but that's not what it's all about -- the guerrillas are fighting with nothing."¹¹² A comprehensive analysis of the US security assistance program should be undertaken to make sure the AFP is getting the kind of equipment it needs to fight a counterinsurgency war. Fundamental considerations should include maintainability, availability of spare parts, and operational costs.

Our military training programs with the AFP should follow similar guidelines. Again, the brunt of the training in counterinsurgency operations will have to be borne by AFP cadres. However, we can provide limited military training in such areas as small unit tactics, tactical intelligence collection, and field communications as well as specialized maintenance courses for maintaining US-supplied equipment, through various sources here in the United States and at our facilities in the Philippines. Development of a professional junior officer leadership and sound tactical doctrine should be our goals in these programs. Again, we must exercise caution here and not attempt to "over advise" AFP cadres or make them excessively dependent on US technology during their training.

CONCLUSIONS

There is room for a cautious optimism with regard to the prospects for future political stability in the Philippines. The situation is more optimistic now because there is a fairly firm democratic process at work in the Philippines. This is the starting point from which the Aquino government must work to solve the more deep-rooted problems that continue to fuel the communist insurgency. In looking toward the future, the Aquino government must ensure the democratic framework instituted over the past 3 years provides more than just short-term stability. Unfortunately, the elite nature of the new democratic order may itself contain the seeds of future instability. Continued corruption, lack of concern for development in the more isolated regions, and the absence of minimal redistribution reforms will, in time, serve to undercut government legitimacy. In this sense, perceptions are all important. The government must give the perception that it is at least trying to attack the myriad of

social injustices and economic development problems that abound in the Filipino countryside. Overnight success is not what the typical Filipino peasant is looking for. His major concern is that somebody cares; if that "somebody" is not the government, the communists will step in.

The success of the government counterinsurgency effort will ultimately depend on its ability to put together a program that balances socioeconomic reform, the restoration of government credibility and a sense of social justice, and appropriate military action. Putting together such a program requires strong presidential leadership and an equally strong seriousness of purpose on the part of the national leadership. Unfortunately, both of these ingredients seem to be lacking at the moment. President Aquino has had a very difficult time keeping the traditional elites and power brokers in line. Instead of coming up with a strong domestic program upon taking office, she ceded the political initiative to a Congress unconcerned with true reform and that "largely regards the NPA insurgency as just another rural rebellion requiring a quick and easy military fix."¹¹³ Aquino's view of political democracy is to "give the country the political structure necessary and the people will take it from there."¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, this conception doesn't mesh with a political culture characterized by a penchant to look after one's self, not one's country. The result of this mismatch is a government counterinsurgency effort that lacks dynamism and that has demonstrated very uneven progress nationwide to date.

President Aquino must take an aggressive stance in articulating a common sense of purpose and objectives and in combatting rampant "me-ism" at the national leadership level. She must work to ensure more cooperation and coordination between the national ministries, the AFP, and provincial and local governments. She must hold her cabinet officers accountable for tasks assigned. Only after a true national consciousness concerning the seriousness of the communist threat has been developed can the government put together a comprehensive and effective counterinsurgency strategy. This will be no easy task given the fact that a sense of nationalism cannot be built overnight. Nevertheless, an attempt to forge a unified approach to the communist threat is imperative.

In addition to developing a greater sense of nationalism, the leaders of the fledgling democratic system in the Philippines must wakeup to the realities of the Maoist revolutionary strategy pursued by the insurgents. Too many key players in the Aquino government and the Congress regard the insurgency as merely a security problem that calls for a military solution. These individuals would do well to heed the following warning offered by General Richard Stillwell:

The military cannot go it alone. Counterinsurgency campaigns require government actions to address the grievances of the rural population, police action to root out the embedded communist apparatus, and military actions to provide security to hunt down the armed guerrillas. Without those complementary actions, the units of the [NPA] will be hard to find, and every guerrilla who is killed will be replaced by the communist political cadres.¹¹⁵

The insurgency does have a growing and credible military component but has its strongest roots in political organization. In fact, in areas where the NPA is strongest politically (i.e., Samar) there is hardly any military activity. At any rate, the military cannot serve as the leading edge of the government counterinsurgency effort. To uproot the communist political organization at the local level, the government must shed its lethargic, apathetic attitude and develop political, social, and economic programs that will effectively undercut insurgent organizational efforts. The key here is to establish a permanent presence at the local level and begin to work on satisfying grievances that currently serve as the bond between the insurgent leadership and their mass base. To help accomplish this goal and take the moral high ground at the local level, the Aquino government needs to take the following actions:

- Expand traditional Luzon-centered economic development focus to more isolated areas.
- Be willing to devote resources to regions where the problems are.
- Attend to construction and infrastructure repair outside the Metro Manila area.
- Restore justice and law enforcement at the local level.
- Decentralize rural contracting and financing.
- Unplug donor aid pipeline blockages and put resources to use in programs that make a difference at the local level.
- Carry out initial phases of CARP in a timely manner.
- Involve civilian agencies in civic action efforts to relieve some of the burden from the AFP.
- Must be willing to act to remove corrupt local officials if necessary.

Again the government will find that none of the above measures will be easy to put into place. Indeed, some may be quite painful and disruptive initially. Fortunately, international goodwill toward the Aquino government is running high and a continued influx of international assistance is likely. Efficiently and creatively used, foreign assistance can provide an important part of the financial and material aid necessary for continued economic recovery and an assault on the real roots of the communist insurgency. The real challenge for the Aquino government in this area will be to root out the entrenched graft, corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks that have significantly dissipated past efforts to correct deficiencies in the countryside.

Hand-in-hand with the above actions, the government needs to concentrate more on establishing a permanent security apparatus at the local level to protect people and infrastructure. As I stated earlier, the SOT/CAFGUA concept may provide a solution to this problem in the long-term. In any case, a lasting approach to local security will require an integrated effort on the part of elected officials, police, and local AFP units. Continued attention to human rights abuses will be necessary to win over soft-core NPA supporters and establish the rapport with locals essential to the establishment of an effective local intelligence network.

The past 3 years have witnessed much improvement in the government's military approach to the counterinsurgency effort. However, as in the case of the other areas mentioned, there is still much room for improvement. The most basic problem in the military counterinsurgency effort has been overcome -- recognition of deficiencies in AFP combat capability, counterinsurgency strategy, procedures, and personnel on the part of the senior AFP leadership. Continued attention to the problems I outlined in an earlier section is necessary to ensure continued progress is made against leadership deficiencies and the resources problem. In these areas, competence must be the main criterion for command assignment, and more attention must be paid to ensure that newly received equipment actually gets down to the field units. Other areas that merit more attention within the military realm are:

- The need for the provision of more budgetary resources to the AFP.
- The funding of a credible amnesty program.
- Application of sanctions against flagrant human rights violators within the AFP.
- Demonstration that the government cares about the military and appreciates its sacrifices.

- Less concentration on NPA numbers on the part of AFP strategists.
- Concentration on humane treatment of NPA deserters and informants.

If the Aquino government is able to develop a comprehensive, integrated counterinsurgency effort incorporating the suggestions outlined above, the balance sheet for political stability looks positive. At any rate, the NPA is not about to break down the doors of Malacanang Palace. Even in the worst case, I don't see a total communist victory, rather a scenario in which the government will continue to have its way in Manila and Central Luzon, with Northern Luzon and the outlying islands controlled by a mix of AFP units, local warlords, anti-communist vigilante groups, and, of course, the NPA. Recognizing this, the challenge for the Aquino government will be to contain insurgent violence to a minimum acceptable level to allow local officials to implement socioeconomic development and land reform programs. Military containment of the insurgency to a "tolerable" level of violence in this manner is necessary but subordinate to the long-term political battle that can only be won by following through on promised socioeconomic reforms.

Improving upon the current socioeconomic and military approaches to the insurgency problem will no doubt prove an arduous task for the Philippine leadership. Nevertheless, effective government response in these areas is critical to the future of democracy in that country. In the end, government response will determine the progress and outcome of the NPA insurgency. As Bard O'Neill succinctly puts it:

What the government does or neglects to do and how it performs has a direct bearing on the strategies and forms of warfare insurgents choose and the nature and extent of challenges insurgents must cope with as they seek to accomplish their aims. The more the government responses are informed, prudent, relevant, determined, and disciplined, the greater the burden on the insurgents.¹¹⁶

Defeating the armed left will require a combination of political will, substantial resources, and a clear understanding of the nature of the communist insurgency on the part of the Philippine national leadership. If they choose not to accept these challenges, time will be on the side of the New People's Army.

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